

News Release



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State Parks Commission Enters War on Obesity By Adopting New State Recreation Policy

Blueprint and Call to Action for Healthier California

SAN JOSE – Meeting in San Jose today, the California State Park and Recreation Commission adopted a new California Recreation Policy which emphasizes a new direction in recreation services for improving the health and well-being of all citizens and combating the growing obesity epidemic. The vote was unanimous among the seven members present: Bobby Shriver, Caryl Hart, Joe Cotchett, Phillip Tagami, Gail Kautz, Sophia Sherman and Acquanetta Warren.

The California Recreation Policy for 2005 is intended to be an energetic new blueprint, a call-to action, for park and recreation providers from every level -- city, county, regional, special district and state, public and private -- to provide the leadership to aggressively press for programs and activities that address significant trends now prevalent and growing in California society.

Those trends include: changes in health, wellness and obesity, demands for environmental justice, the demand for placing parks closer to where people live regardless of income levels, the demand to make all park facilities more accessible to all citizens, and the demand for more recreational opportunities and facilities due to California's rapid growth.

One of the major recommendations supports the Governor's groundbreaking new program on Health, Nutrition and Obesity, by zeroing in on the recent and disturbing trend of obesity, especially among children. The policy states: Park and recreational professionals should promote and support increased physical activity among Californians, which is critical to combating the obesity epidemic and preventing serious, chronic conditions like heart disease and diabetes (Recommendation #3).

The Commission's Policy Oversight Committee, State Park Commissioners Caryl Hart and Gail Kautz, were instrumental in reviewing the policy and recommending it for approval to the Commission.

Commissioner Hart said: "I consider outdoor recreation as vital to both our mental and physical health. Our natural environment provides a wide array of beautiful places where people can escape the stresses of everyday living and get fit through the many forms of recreational opportunities available. We must exercise a leadership role in providing for these places and in helping families understand the benefits for their quality of life."

Commissioner Gail Kautz called the policy critical, saying: "California's parks and recreational lands are among the best in the world. The problem is that in this rapidly changing California, we have too many people sitting and too few people out enjoying our parks and getting some exercise. This policy asks recreation professionals at every level to do all possible to provide information and opportunities to get people moving in a healthier direction."

The new policy calls upon recreational providers across the state to take a bold direction and exercise a leadership role in ensuring that a full range of stimulating, enjoyable and safe recreation experiences are available to their constituents. It calls upon providers to coordinate their efforts and provide more access to park and recreation facilities for people of all ages and abilities. In addition, it calls upon the State to help local areas by means of grants and technical assistance to encourage a better delivery of recreational services

"A key message here," said Parks and Recreation Commission Chair Bobby Shriver, "is that our kids are in trouble and that is not an overstatement. All the members of this Commission were stunned to learn that this generation of California children will be the first to have a shorter life span than their parents. We cannot mandate fixes, but we hope this policy serves as a motivator to do something about that. "

"Californians have gained 360 million pounds in the last 10 years" said Jane Adams, Executive Director of the California Parks and Recreation Society. "More than 1/4 of our children and more than 1/2 of our adults are overweight. We look to California State Parks and the State Park and Recreation Commission to be leaders by setting the pace and tone for the protection of our natural and cultural assets. Through the California Recreation Policy, all the recreation and park providers throughout the state will gain a sense of direction and purpose."

The five recommendations of the California Recreation Policy for 2005 are:

1. **Adequacy of recreation opportunities** – This policy states that an ample supply of parks and recreation areas should exist throughout California so that all people can safely engage in near-home activities, with particular attention given to recreation areas in and near the urban areas where most Californians live. It further emphasizes that it is important to recognize the need for critical recreational facilities in rapidly growing rural areas.

2. **Leadership in recreation management** – Park agencies and organizations at all levels, public and private, should exercise leadership, cooperation and partnership to ensure that quality recreation resources, opportunities, programs and services are provided. Professionals in parks and recreation must lead the way in providing recreational opportunities

3. **Recreation's role in a healthier California** -- Increased physical activity among Californians is critical to combating the obesity epidemic and preventing serious, chronic conditions like heart disease and diabetes. It is imperative that Californians understand and recognize that park and recreation lands, facilities and programs are a positive force for fostering healthier families and for fighting against rising crime and healthcare costs.

4. **Preservation of natural and cultural resources** – To ensure that resource lands, waterways and natural habitats are available for the recreational opportunity and enjoyment of future generations, a comprehensive environmental ethic should be fostered among all Californians. If Californians are educated about why a healthy environment also serves the purpose of keeping themselves healthy, they will place more value on the natural and cultural resources of the state.

5. **Accessibility to all Californians** – Californians should have safe access to a park or other recreation area within walking distance of where they live, regardless of income level. In addition, physical barriers and administrative obstacles should be eliminated whenever possible so that California's park and recreational lands, waters, facilities, activities and programs are accessible to all who want to enjoy a healthier lifestyle. These principles should govern the process of thorough planning and farsighted parkland acquisition to assure that the needs of a changing California population are met in future years.

"Our Commissioners and all those who participated in updating this policy are truly worried about the future health and well-being of our citizens," said State Parks' Director Ruth Coleman. "We hope the seriousness of this call-to-action is not ignored. The recommendations in this policy are right on target and must be turned into action to promote a healthier California with more recreational opportunities."

California's Recreation Policy is mandated by California Public Resources Code, Article 2, State Park and Recreation Commission, 540 (b), which states: "The Commission (State Park and Recreation) shall formulate, in cooperation with other state agencies, interested organizations and citizens, and shall recommend to the Director (of the department of Parks and Recreation) for adoption by him/her, a comprehensive recreational policy for the State of California."

Creating the policy included extensive collaboration. The California Parks and Recreation Society, the organization representing hundreds of local, county and regional park agencies across the state, played a vital role in formulating the new policy. State Park Commissioners Gail Kautz and Caryl Hart and state park staff met with a multitude of park and recreation professionals from across the state. The process included meetings of a 27-member Recreation Policy Oversight Committee made up of local, regional, state, federal, public and private organizations and agencies. It was presented for review before eight different park and health planning agencies. It was also offered for review to more than 92 parks professionals across the state and the draft was posted for comments on the Department's website.

The last version was adopted in 1994. There is no time requirement in statute for updating the policy on a regular basis. State Parks believes that it should be revisited as significant trends within society dictate such a review. In this case, the issue first came before the Commission in May 2004, with a draft policy reviewed and adopted in April 2005 and final adoption recommended to the Commission in September 2005.

Note: Those wishing to see the policy can go to the State Parks' web page:
http://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/795/files/DRAFTRecPolicy_082605.pdf.

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